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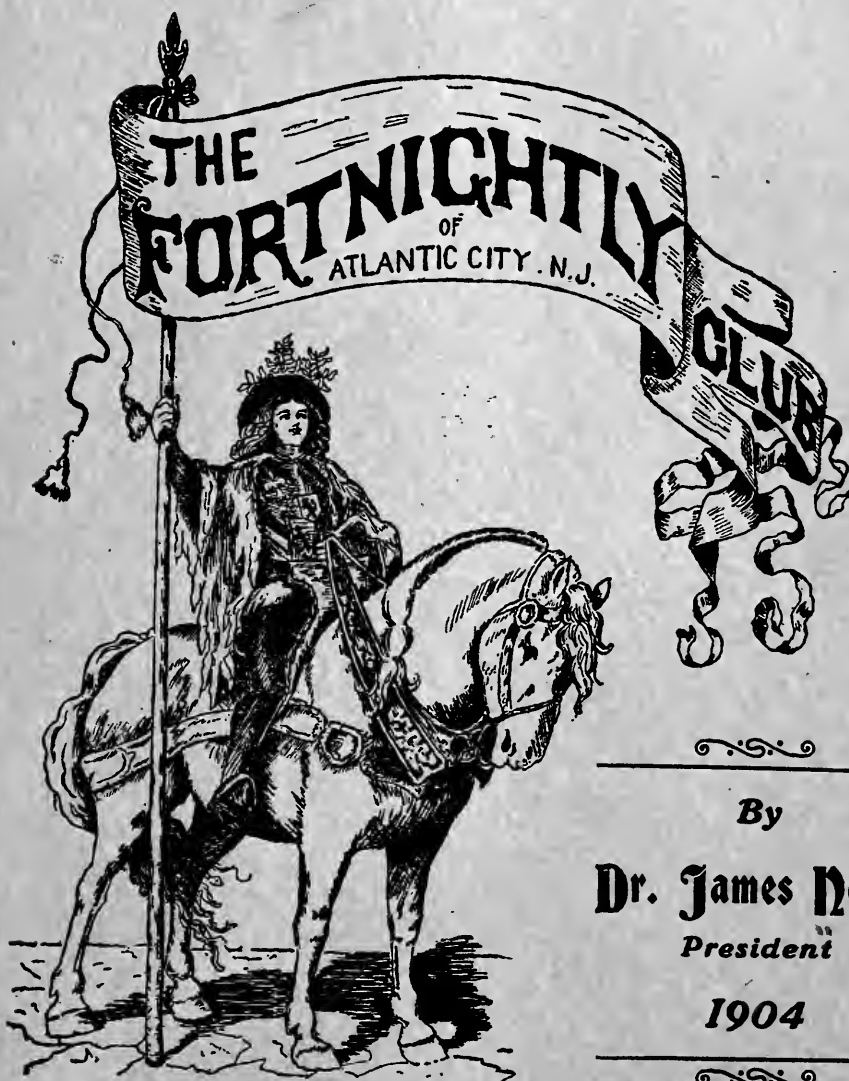
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Poems
on
Shakespeare

Dedicated to



By

Dr. James North

President

1904

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THE POETRY OF SHAKESPEARE

Read before The Fortnightly Club

JANUARY 31, 1898

I come with reverence and bowed head,
To add my frail and humble offering;
These soul-begot, though lip-born flowers of speech,
Like dusty primrose of his native heath,
Yet regal, as the jeweled flowers that glow
Resplendent through the wierd Arabian tales,
Pregnant with spicy breath of far-off Ind,
If my heart's motives are but weighed,
And love and veneration count for aught,
From one unknown, for England's greatest son.

Beside pellucid Avon's daisied banks,
'Mid scenes he loved so well, his ashes lie:
But his great works are known the wide world o'er,
And grateful hearts of that great world have decked,
His God-like brow, with richer, rarer crown,
Than Rome's imperial Caesar thrice refused.

Three thousand rounded years, since Homer sang
Of one Ulysses, and of hapless Troy;
Of beauteous Helen and Achilles' might,
Ere Melpomene did preside in state
At the auspicious birth, of one still greater.

For in the changeless circling round of time,
Those epochs come in every living art,
When culminating efforts, bud to bloom
Into achievements, of some genius great,
Whose ripe, o'ermastering mind, doth firmly stamp
His inerasible impress upon
The very forehead of his time and age:
Examples living, to the humbler ones
Who strive to put in forms most tangible,
The hidden inspirations of the soul.

So Homer sang neath purple skies of Greece
His wondrous songs. So gifted Phidias wrought
From cold and senseless stone his forms divine,
So one Demosthenes beside the Attic Sea,
Did woo and win the muse of eloquence,

And Raphael, captive held in pigments crude,
His fleeting visions of God's paradise.
So Shakespeare, with his gift of thought divine,
Lit up the darkness of the human soul,
And peopled realms till then unknown, with forms
Though phantom, seeming tangible and real:
So Garrick, up to nature deftly held
The mirror's face. While inspiration-crowned
Beethoven did his wondrous music make,
As sweet as the enraptured angels heard
When Saint Cecelia sang.

This constellation of the world of art,
Sums up its essence and its glory too:
For who doth seek and note the lesser stars,
When glowing planets meet the wondering ken?
For each in his peculiar sphere hath marked,
The highest altitude vouchsafed to man,
And Time, doth in his fruitful bosom hold
The embryonic soul, which may do more.

Greater than Homer of a ruder age,
Who with objective mind, contented was
To paint in glowing words and shining phrase—
Which to the senses did alone appeal.
Keeping the world perpetually in view.
And yet in his expression crystal clear;
Greater than Homer, as Ulysses was,
Less than Prospero.

Greater than Dante, he whose restless soul
Sought inspiration in the nether world,
When human love ceased to be adequate,
Unto the longings of his mature heart:
Greater than Dante, as the shade who walked
The endless labyrinth of purgatory 'round,
Was less than Hamlet.

Greater than Milton, as great Caesar was,
Than fallen Lucifer.

Shakespeare the child of a maturer age
Delved in the inmost recess of the soul,
And by the instincts of his genius made
Familiar combinations of most subtle thought
To light the inner mysteries of our being brought;
Though greater, oftimes more obscure than he,
Whom Aristotle crowned with highest praise,
"As best example."

Yet he was more
Than the stupendous whole of his creations:
No trivial matter that to raise ones self
Unto the dizzy height at which the mind
Doth comprehend and feel his own mind's greatness,
Nor can be judged from one lone character,
The total product of his majesty.

A pure idealist he, yet in his art,
A realist above all, and of an age
In its environments most practical:
The outcome of a life both rich and manifold,
O'er full of sense enjoyment and of energy.

Thus did he reach the truths of human life
Through insight deep and energy supreme,
Of love, imagination and of thought:
And so his poems do give the stuff of life,
Coarse with the fine, heroic with the mean,
And humorous, with the tragic and the terrible:
Bringing his characters upon the scene
In that perfection highest, yet attained,
Of truth.

Religious in that meaning and the sense,
Which seeth God and good, in running brooks,
In singing birds, and swaying violets:
Not bound by creeds, and less by dogmas held:
Yet colored by the spirit of his day,
And of his land.

From out the sepulchres of departed kings
Troop shadowy shades in endless perspective,
Whose deeds have made the history of the world:
And through the wondrous fabric of his art,
Like garlands run the little lives and loves,
The trifling sorrows, and the greater joys,
Which make the world a stage.

His was the power to sound the depths
Of human nature, and to tear from out
Of stubborn hearts, the secrets of the soul;
Making the motives clear, as were the acts;
Rebellious passion and all-conquering love,
Undying hate and heavenly mercy, pure as dew,
Green jealousy, and trembling fear,
That starts at shadows.

From every page the poets presence shines,
Not less on Duke Prospero's solitary isle,
Where ministering spirits on his comfort wait,
Than that strange dream of one Midsummer Night
Whose poetry like a gossamer thread connects
This most real world, and brighter fairyland:
Or poppy-crowned Ophelia, unwed spouse,
To that most melancholy Dane.

Whose art save his could paint that aged King
On the lone heath, with naught between his head
And the chill force of angry elements,
With no supporting arm save motley fool's,
Faithful when filial gratitude had fled?

He who was lord of that most fair domain,
Whose broadening plains, and shady forest glades,
Whose curtained hills, and plenteous rivers ran,
Through beauteous Britain's realms, divided now
Twixt the unnatural fruit of his aged loins;
Gone fleeting wealth like dream of Lydia's King,
Gone power supreme as when at Roma's gates,
The sweeping hoards of grim Attila knocked.
Gone children, too, as fair Niobe's, through
O'erweaming pride in her sweet counterfeits;
Now only tears, words inarticulate,
Unbalanced reason with its train of ills,
Tempestuous storm and night.

Or paint Othello, winning Desdemona's love,
In marble palaces of Doge's dead
And living Senators, whose wealth and power
Were great as crowned kings: Or catch the glint,
Of light on purple waves, that came to lip
With amorous tide, the cold white stones of Venice:
And light the little landscape of their love,
Until Iago's snake-like cunning, bound
Them in it's folds, and green-eyed jealousy
Did tempt the Moor to do the damning deed
O'er which Oblivion drew her sable robes.

Come float with him 'long Nilus' reedy banks,
'Mid mystic lotus-jewelled, sensuous blooms,
Kissed by the zephyrs from the Indian Sea,
All fragrant with the breath of spicy groves.
Behold mysterious Egypt's beauteous queen

Ere yet the cold and coiling asp, between
Those ivory bosoms, kissed the life away,
And the soft light from those bewitching eyes,
Were veiled by Death.

Around that sinuous form, proud Caesar's arm
Hath wound, and for a kiss from those red lips
The noble Antony did stake his all:
And in the witchery of that wondrous love
Which filled to overflow his brimming soul
Imperious Jove from high Olympus fell;
And mounted high among his fallen gods
Mysterious Isis with her golden horns,
And his Queen's starlit eyes, sat on the throne
And ruled the world.

Can you not see the purple dome of heaven
Lit with the countless tapers of the night?
And Nilus sweeping toward the awaiting sea
Between its shadowy banks, where crumbling stand,
The columns of its bygone temples vast,
And pyramids whose capstones kiss the sky,
And on the moonlit bosom of the stream,
An ivory shallop gliding, silken sailed,
Wafted by breezes from Sahara's waste,
Freighted with destinies of two great worlds,
Hand clasped in hand, and heart to heart?

His works are greatest, because Truth's supreme!
From every ringing line, poetic thought,
And inspiration palpitate and breathe,
Showing a soul touched by the form divine,
And presence of that being, on whose shrine,
The fruits of his great mind were offered up.
The rose, the glass, the youth, the living light
Which he set up to worship and revere,
The essence of poetic beauty deified.

No less in lighter vein than graver thought,
Where his dramatic genius sits enthroned,
As when in vivid colors he portrays,
All fragrant with the breath of summer's day,
A woman's passion and a youth's disdain.

Set in Elysian fields, through sunkissed meads,
'Neath leafy shades and by the purling brooks,
The Queen of Beauty woos the stubborn boy.

And only when the envious boar hath rent
With cruel tusk his warm and tender flesh
And his life blood hath dyed the pallid flowers,
Did she forsake the scenes of her unfed desire:
'Tis hoped, that purest buds may burst to bloom
Within the minds of those who read the verse.

Most earthly of the earth, is that dark tale
Of ancient Rome: Alas the fateful day
When Colitinus spake of chaste Lucrece!
And darker night, most sombre fateful night,
When he who wore the Caesar's crown did stoop
To steal the precious jewel of his friend:
When Tarquin's torch was quenched 'neath Tarquin's foot,
And Tarquin's honor fell 'neath Tarquin's lust,
When pitying darkness drew her veil o'er Tarquin's crime.

Or, in his sonnets, which like garlands wind
Around the greater efforts of his muse,
Where in expression beautified, he paints
The ideal of his soul, which like unto
Pygmalion's Galatea, at Venus' touch,
Doth 'neath his burning passion spring to life;
And forth to that fair creature doth he pour
His hopes, his fears, his aspirations and desires.

Or in that lone complaint, that dewless flower
Of unrequited love, of heart-rung sighs,
Of vain regrets.

Yet clear and over all, mysterious as
The light which bathed Salambo's lifted brow,
When 'round her shrinking form, the python's coils
Were wound, shines out, and evermore will shine,
The inscrutable mysteries of human life,
The unutterable language of the human soul.

As their exponent—as their priest and poet,
Shakespeare doth reign supreme,

SHAKESPEARE

Read before The Fortnightly Club

MAY 23, 1898

I.

In Stratford by the blue Avon,
Whose sparkling waters ripple on
Through English scenes 'neath English yews;
Its glossy bosom rich with hues
Of primrose hedge and daisied lea,
Bearing its message to the sea
That fondles Albion's rock-bound coast,
The ashes lie, of one whose lore
Was filled with light like England's sky:
Whose works are England's proudest boast,
Whose grave 's as sacred, as to host
Of turbaned Moslems low in prayer,
Begrimed with dust, is Mecca's shrine,
Believing that their prophet's there.

II.

Pilgrims of every land and race,
Toward quiet Stratford turn the face,
To feel within its perfumed air
The master's spirit boding there.
To drink again his thoughts divine
Which stir the soul like Attic wine.
Like visions in a dream arise
The god-like forms that dwelt of yore,
With all their attributes which lie
Too deep for view of careless eyes.
Not one his skillful touch denies,
For by his genius glow again
Imperial Caesar's brow benign,
Macbeth's stern Queen and princely Dane.

III.

And while Time's ceaseless rivers run,
From land of night to land of sun;
And man shall strive to win renown,
To wear Fame's priceless golden crown,
The name of Shakespeare, long revered,
To every scholar's heart endeared,
Will shine a beacon through the night
Of doubts and fears which hedge us 'round,
While struggling in the onward press,
And bursting on the wondering sight
With radiance of the northern light,
Which streams across the midnight sky,
To light in timid hearts the flame
Of courage, to succeed or die.

MACBETH'S SOLILOQUY

Read before The Fortnightly Club

DECEMBER 5, 1898

"Glamis and Cawdor, and hereafter king!"
Methinks this phophecy doth surely wear
The livery of my heart's dearest desire.
And if the womb of Time doth breed such acts,
That, growing to maturity, shall make
Uncertainty a fact, why hesitate
To be the conscious instrument of Fate,
And to unravel by directing mind,
The tangled skein of man's uncertain life?

Great Scotland's fate is by the Fates foretold:
And is it meet for me to question them,
When by its consummation, the decree
Doth raise me to the level of my hopes,
And backs my act by strongest argument?

'Tis the same blood that's in great Duncan's veins,
Which irrigates the hand that dares to change,
The sanguine current to a nobler source.
And on that action Justice sits enthroned,
Holding impartial scales which truly weigh
Man's highest motives. For this seemeth true,
The course of Justice and my own desire,
Doth in the self-same groove or channel run:
And any scruple that my conscience forms,
From kinship, or from hospitality,
Is overcome, and by it beaten down.

True, he my cousin is: But did that fact
Weigh aught with the usurper of my throne,
Or keep the sleepy eyelid ope, because
Of great injustice done unto his kin?
He is my guest: But coming in disguise,
Decked in regalia which by right belongs
Unto his host, would he then hesitate,
To take the body, when its crown adorns

His own usurping brow, and blot the life,
As he has snuffed its splendor?

Here Inclination is perhaps outrun
By Opportunity. I dream my dreams
With reservation held in leash, as hounds
In hand, when noble quarry seeming spent,
Is sure to fall to my advantage. Luck
Gives us that which Labor oft denies, and
Necessity of effort moves aside
For Fortune.

I thought to fill the throne, nor had conceived
The way to consummation: Hardly breathed
The secret, which like a pallid prisoner,
By interest double-locked within the goal
Of my own breast, came only forth to argue
With its keeper. But there upon the heath
Did Banquo see the tenant of my soul,
And the complexion of my cheek did make
Most manifest the cause of my confusion.
As I did start when the Weird Sisters spake.
I, Thane of Glamis, was as "Cawdor" hailed;
As "Macbeth, that shall be hereafter king."

Maormor of Ross-shire and of Moray
Is less than king. O'er these provincial bounds
Doth my ambition vault. For, on the throne,
I see the chance of largesses manifold:
The building up of Church, and State, and more—
The subjugation of proud Norway, too.
The sword which won for Duncan victory,
For Macbeth and for Scotland may do more.

With Duncan gone, shall Banquo take his place
As the Nemesis of my royal dreams?
That is the ominous thought that bids me pause.

"SHAKESPEARE'S IDEAL WOMAN."

A TOAST

Given at The Fortnightly Club Banquet, Hotel Dennis

MAY 12, 1902

I.

This toast I give to one whose worth
The thoughtless world may never know:
Whose presence cheered his brightest hours,
Whose smile made light his deepest woe:
Not Egypt's Queen of sinuous grace,
Nor Rosalind of pastoral lay,
I drink to her who shared his lot,
To Shakespeare's love, Ann Hathaway!

II.

Her love as great as Portia's love,
Sought not in public acts acclaim.
Hers nourished in their humble cot,
Depended not on courts for fame.
A deeper love than Juliets',
A love that strove to live, and sway
The heart of one who was her lord,
The bard who loved Ann Hathaway.

III.

I sigh at Desdemona's fate,
At fair Ophelia's lot I weep.
I struggle with proud Macbeth's dame,
Against fate's stern relentless sweep.
Yet they were visions light as air,
With which the poet's fancies play.
He turned from these to bow before
His heart's first choice, Ann Hathaway

IV.

His ideal woman was as ours,
One whose true worth is manifest
In every action of her life,
In one whose blessings doubly bless.
His queenliest women wore no crowns,
They were the ones, whose hearts held sway
O'er home and loved ones, and of such
Was Shakespeare's Queen, Ann Hathaway.

V.

So fill your glasses to the brim,
With wine that cheers, to one whose fame,
As fragile as a tender flower,
Clings to the glory of his name.
Their heart's great drama ne'er was writ—
Why heed the puppets of the play?
The curtain 's down, the lights are out.
We'll drink to sweet Ann Hathaway!

HENRY SIXTH, SECOND PART

STORY OF THE SECOND ACT

Read before The Fortnightly Club

JANUARY 5, 1903

The scene is laid before Saint Alban's gates,
High o'er the placid bosom of the Ver,
Reflecting back each tower and battlement.

There through the sward protrude the crumbling stones
That mark the ancient site of Verulam.
Old ere the walls of hoary London Town,
Arose above the muddy banks of Thames.

There in the misty aeons past and gone,
Long ere the feet of Caesar's legions pressed
The shining sands of Albion's sea-girt shore.
Long ere the Britons learned to shape the stones,
The ancient Druids 'neath the whispering oaks
Gave sacrifice and worked their herbal charms.

On prancing steeds and dainty palfrey, high
They hold the hooded hawk, who eager springs
On tireless wing, into the glowing sun,
To strike the heron in her higher flight.

Around the King this brave dramatis personae.
Proud Gloucester, with his eager fingers on
The hilt of his good sword, that oft hath cleft
The helm of his and England's enemies.
The no less haughty Beaufort, cardinal
Of Winchester, great-uncle to the King,
Whose hate, his churchly robes doth ill conceal.
The Duke of Suffolk and the falconers,
Whose gleeful hallooings pierce the ambient air,
And from their winding horns a music add,
And life and zest to this fair pagentry.

Not least the beauties of my lady's train,
Fair buds of Anjou, that will bloom full soon
Into the fairest lilies yet of France.
And stately maidens with their cheeks of rose,
With springing steps betokening life and grace.
The fairest yet of England's proudest homes,
All robed in garments, richly quaint and rare.

Then in the hush of sport a voice is heard.
"Great King! A miracle! A miracle!"
And straightway from Saint Alban's Shrine is brought
A man whose sight the saintly power unsealed.
This is the first he looks upon the world,
This is the first his eyes behold his king.
And while the rustics stare and courtiers smile
The searching tongue of Gloucester doth confound
The wiley Simpox, and straightway doth call
Saint Alban's Beadle with his scourgé to whip
The trembling knave, and lead him to the stocks.

Then enters Buckingham with aspect grave,
And at the King's command relates the plot
Of Eleanor, the Lord Protector's wife.
How by the conjurers acts she did contrive,
How by the aid of witches did conspire,
And raising up of spirits did design,
To take the strength and life of England's King.

When Justice moves, let Pity hide her eyes,
And gentle Mercy wrap around the sword,
Her mantle, lest the blow should cut beyond
The guilty one, and pierce some nobler heart,
Tearing the silken cords that bind as one
The good and evil: And by sorrow bring
To one most innocent a greater wrong
Perhaps than was at first essayed.

So benefits alas forgotten are
When circumstances cast a shadow o'er
The stainless shield that Friendship e'er must bear.
And the barbed arrows sent by Calumny,
When Superstition dims the eyes alert,
Find lodgment where they prick and rankle most.
And the whole scheme of Justice is abort
When by her acts some greater villain mounts
O'er lesser ones to profit and acclaim.

So Gloucester's star doth pale and sink in gloom
While Beaufort's to the very zenith mounts.
And like the planet Mars, it's rays are red
Foreboding more than Margaret's bitter words,
Which seem as fated as the hemlocks juice
To hopeless ones, when death alone is kind.

Then shifts the scene as at a village fair
When strolling players, in their dire need
Drop curtain city 'fore a canvas plain.
While heralds gaudily attired proclaim
To clamoring pit, or crowd upon the green,
The transformation made by cloth and paint.

Now 'neath the shady trees, 'mid garden walks
That hem the castle round, of York's abode,
We hear the arch conspirator reveal
The well laid plot, that needs but Warwick's aid.
And that long pedigree which seems to prove,
The right and justice of another line,
That hides the pallid rose of Lancaster
Beneath the flaming, blood-red rose of York;
And raises high proud Richard's fondest hope
Unto the dizzy height of Henry's throne.

Then fades the scene into a Justice Hall,
Where enter King and Queen and courtiers,
To hear the sentence of Dame Eleanor,
"Her banishment unto the Isle of Man."

The blow that smites must fell not her alone,
A nobler quarry doth the hunter seek.
That in her fall, she may drag in the dust
The priceless honor of a noble name.

So doth his trembling hand yield up the staff
Unto his King. Alas! in whose behalf
That self-same hand were as a hand of steel
When it held high the sword in his defense.

Then like a truant tear is brushed away
The solemn grandure of this tragic scene.
Before the smile of low hilarity
The drunken rabble and the pseudo knights
With airs bombastic, cowards all at heart,
Who ape their betters, and in mimic joust
Yet earnest travesty of noble scene
At which the wise may smile and fools may laugh.

Then fades, as in a wizard's glass the scenes
By Hypnos conjured up from out the realms
Where Psychos dwells, to fool the tangled mind.
From day to night, from laughter unto tears,
From Comedy unto the Tragic Muse
Whose stately pace moves measuredly along
Trailing her sombre garments toward the grave.

Here in the purlieus of a gloomy street
Now enters Gloucester, meditating on
The dim uncertainties of human life,
The laws immutable of seasons change.
Of nights succeeding days, which did succeed
Yet other nights. Of suns obscured by clouds
None could foretell, as hope's rays are obscured
By clouds of dire calamity and death.

Then like a phantom from the ebon gloom,
Or more the vision of a sheeted ghost;
Made whiter by the taper's fitful glare.
Dame Eleanor, the Lord Protector's wife,
Moves haltingly across the fearful scene,
With head unbonneted and feet unshod.
She leans on Sir John Stanley's aiding arm.
The Sheriff's rabble hooting at her heels.
Unto her lord her supplicating eyes
Appeal for love, in this her dire distress,
Nor pity asks from aught, save him she loves

No sorrow can her haughty spirit break
No shame so great, can bow that regal head
No fear of banishment or death can stop
For one short moment in its onward course
The noble blood that pulsates in her breast
And bring the coward pallor to her cheek,
But her sharp tongue, which knows no hindering check
Complains of Fortune's deep and envious thrust.
And like a Sibyl, prophesies the fall
Of tottering Gloucester, and his clinging friends
Through Suffolk, Warwick and the hateful York.

The royal herald summons Gloucester hence,
To meet the King at Bury's Parliament.
His unwiped tears must be his last farewell,
For tears may spring, when tongues all palsied be.
'Tis only when these sluices of the soul
Obstructed are, that straining hearts do break.

His Duchess' eyes distill no helpful tears
With head erect and carriage of a queen,
She slowly moves toward the White Swan Stairs,
Treading the road to shame and banishment.

(Thus ends the Second Act of Henry Sixth.)

THE TOURNAMENT

Read before The Fortnightly Club

MARCH 2, 1903

I.

There's a glint of steel and velvet, where the heralds ride to-day
From out the tomes of parchment, and from out the poet's brain.
There's a blast of brazen trumpets, and the jar of horses feet,
And a glow of ladies' favors, where the kings of tourney reign.

II.

I can see the hosts that gather, from the moorlands and the fell,
Though I see them indistinctly as did Merlin through the mists.
And I hear as in a wizard's dream their voices from afar,
With the shouting and the turmoil 'round the barrier and lists.

III.

The great court is surrounded by the tents of Lord and Knight,
While a thousand silken banners float upon the ambient air.
And the troubadours are fingering and mouthing to the lute,
As they sigh their amorous ditties to the queenly and the fair.

IV.

There are Latins, Celts and Normans, some from blest Jerusalem,
There are Knights from nearby Anjou, and the plains of Aquitaine,
From the distant German forests, and the lowlands of the Elbe,
From the sombre shores of Scotland, and the sunset sands of Spain.

V.

There are hands that wield the sceptre, there are heads that wear the crown,
There are priestly robes begrimed with dust, and sandals worn and old.
Here a bishop's cross and mitre, there a pope in purple clad,
And a hundred beauteous princesses in scarlet and in gold.

VI.

There are damsels 'round their princes, there are ladies 'round their queen.
There are brows that bear the pressure of an Empress' diadem:
There are women famed for beauty, for intrigue and for worth,
And Knights who'd die a thousand times to kiss their garment's hem

VII.

There are beggars, there are gypsies, there are fools in motley dress,
There are shepherds with their lassies, there are maidens with their swains.
There are jugglers and morris-men, and gamblers I wis,
And the hoards that flock to tourneys for the booty and the gains.

VIII.

See yon charger how he prances to the prick of golden spur,
See his nostrils wide expanded, and the fire in his eye.
How his ebon mane is waving like a plume upon the air,
As he shakes his head in welcome to the combat that is nigh.

IX.

Ah, the Knights' shields, how they glisten! Oh the Knights' swords how they shine!
As they cleave the air like wizard's wands, in courtly tournament.
Then the shields grow dim with foam and dust, the swords with blood are red.
With the helmets pierced and battered, the armor torn and rent.

X.

Draw your swords, oh Knights of England! poise your shields oh Knights of France!
There are fond eyes looking on you, there are favors as you know.
Let your strong arms do the bidding of a brave and fearless heart,
There's an honored name to hold aloft, a foeman to bring low.

XI.

What to you is shock of battle? What to you is splintered lance?
For the joust is but a play-time to Knights with hearts of steel,
When your sovereign's eyes are on you, and your lady love is near,
When you strike for country's honor, and you smite for country's weal?

XII.

In the clamorous air of combat, the vision fades away,
All the color and the splendor that to chivalry belong,
While the glory of brave Knighthood, and their trust in woman's worth,
But lingers with the sweetness of a memory haunting song.

SHAKESPEARE, THE BOY

Read before The Fortnightly Club

DECEMBER 21, 1903

If from the sluggish brain, thoughts would distill
All powerful, though slow to crystalize
In musical, in fair and rounded speech:
Then might the lips be praised which faithful serve
The timid soul, and ears that listen, greet
Not critical, but circumspect and kind,
The efforts conscientious yet so weak,
When mind and tongue abreast should quickly run,
And things of moment should be glibly told.

When great souls borned are to earthly life,
If all divine, some great cataclysm
Throbs through earth's sphere, and men with straining eyes
Behold strange things, and powers manifest,
Still the fierce throbbing heart and pall the tongue.

So Christ was born in far off Bethlehem:
And in the purple dome of that fair night,
The brightest star of heaven stood still, and all
Together sang, till from the convex earth
To concave heaven, all space was filled with sound
Of fair celestial choirs, and deep peace
Fell like sweet incense on the souls of men.

Not so beside the Avon's verdant banks,
When chilling Winter fled before the smile
Of swift advancing Spring, and April danced
'Mid peeping primrose and fast swelling buds:
And the fair river strove to burst the bonds
That bound it in its eager course toward
The all-embracing bosom of the sea.

No golden planet that for aye had swung
Through changeless paths of God's unbounded space,
Forgot the laws on which His seal was set,
And stopped its course to guide the eager feet
Of earthly potentates toward the shrine,
Of Christ the earth-born one, immaculate.

No white robed choir with angel voices sung
Of "Endless peace on earth, good-will to men."
No forms celestial gathered 'round the cot,
Where lay the new-born babe who would divide
With Mary's son, the homage of mankind,
And lift the minds, as Christ should lift the souls
Unto the source of all that was or is.

If Melpomene touched his voiceless lips
And Thalia crowned with ivy wreath his brow,
The great world knew it not: And yet ere long,
A master's fingers limned in pigments bright
That rare conception of a human mind.

In the fair winging years twixt birth and youth,
He sat not in the temple to expound
The truth of life, as He of Nazareth,
Till they who came, went forth and marveled much,
Of wisdom far beyond his tender years.

Nor yet like David did he venture forth,
With girded loins, and confidence to slay
The enemy of God and Israel,
Before the armed hosts of mighty men.

On his young brow there sat no kingly crown,
Nor wisdom fell from lips yet slow of speech,
To reach the utmost confines of the earth;
No spirit ministering to every wish,
No temple whitening 'gainst the purple sky.
Nor yet, to him from far off Tyre came
A mighty king and humble widow's son.
No coffer's bursting with the wealth of Ind,
No fingers strong in pride and power to set
The seven-fold-seal of mighty Solomon.

As calm as Avon's stream his life flowed on;
And as the seasons came and went, he grew
In strength and beauty, till the clustering curls
Kissed the broad brow, that like a temple dome
Arched o'er the brain of earth's great intellect:
And on the altar of his soul, the flame
Of genius like a fair white taper glowed:
Pure as a vestal's, and as potent as
The fire Prometheus from Olympus stole.

The lessons from experience he learned
Which all youths learn—which few remember long.
Not all from dusty tomes or mother's lips,
But from the broader scroll that lies unrolled
Before the eyes of all who will observe.

Under the arching skies, when flaming stars,
The signets of God's might, stamped on the night,
Glowed as the promise of the day's return;
Or when the herald sun threw open the gates,
Flooding the earth with all-investing light,
He wandered pensive o'er the widening moors,
Inhaling deep, the mild ambrosial air.

Oft in a mossy dell he laid him down,
While Nature drew his head unto her breast
And whispered life's great secrets in his ear.
The sun, the moon, the stars, the zephyr mild
That like the lips of Love, touch cheek and brow
With soft caress: the wild and wintery wind,
The lightning flash, the echoing thunder peal,
The howling tempest, and the gentle fall
Of spring-time shower, were as the friends who speak
One's mother-tongue when in a far off land.

He knew the natal-day of every flower,
Its hue, its fragrance, and the symbol hid
In its bound buds or petals open thrown.

He learned the potency of every herb,
The mystic power of every leaf and root:
And of their subtle poisons, which distilled
Steal from unguarded brains the sense and life,
And like an infinitesimal germ that breeds,
And breeding spreads a fatal foul disease,
Strikes terror to the heart, the home, the land.

The name of every song bird and its nest,
Where hung or was concealed, in tree or grass:
While the sad note of woeful nightingale,
Or blither one of morn-awakening lark,
Were but as echoes of the notes divine
That trembled on the chords within his soul.

'Twas there perhaps the shadowy forms that stride,
So like, that mimic art seems as the real,
Before the scenes—first gathered tangible,
Though indistinct, as objects in a fog.

Of Kings and prince, of prelate, pope and priest,
Of queen and princess, abbess, nun and maid;
Of England's heroes, once the wall and shield
Of England's greatness—strength which hedged around
The throne, and made her kings and queens the first,
And she the mistress of the sky-bound sea.
But now examples shrined in English hearts:
And yet of humbler folks, of fools most wise,
Of maids and lovers—all the motley throng
That march through English annals to his time.

These were the grains he gleaned in stubble fields
Of chronicles by Holinshed, and tales
Told by the traveler at the roaring hearth
Of village inn, o'er steaming mugs of ale,
Or poor strolling players at the fair
And pageants grand of ancient Coventry:
Or found in some old dog-eared, dusty tome,
Perhaps by Plutarch of Chaeronea penned.

'Twas there the cruder metal was prepared,
Which age should beat to rarest repousse: ,
Until the builded drama, like a shield
Of great Cellini, graced with myriad forms
Of peace and war, of love and tragedy,
In every attribute and feature whole,
Should hang upon the outmost wall of time
An ever shining challenge to the world

A fresh and healthful, boyish life was his,
Filled with boy's sports, boy's hopes and boy's desires.
No morbid fancies festered in his soul
In after years, to bloom in sombre flowers
Of thought and speech, as in the Tuscan's verse.

Then Love came walking where the Avon flowed,
And touched with barbed point the boyish heart.
Then all the flowers put brighter livery on.
Oh wondrous song of love! oh mystic flower!
Oh crystal chalice pure as holy grail!
Thy wine shall brim while men have lips to woo,
Thy flowers shall bloom as long as lips can kiss,
Thy songs shall sound as long as lips can sing.

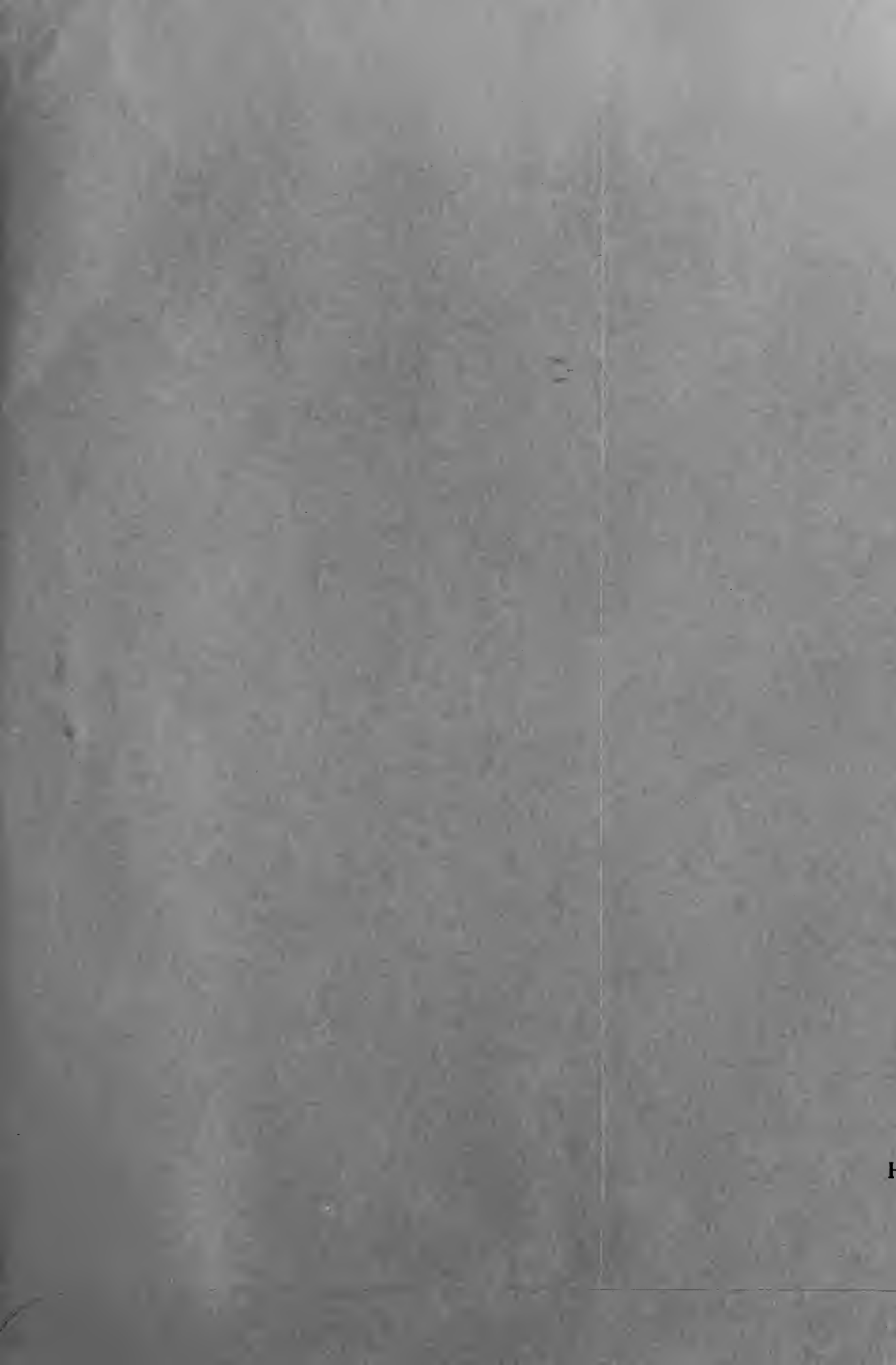




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